

that deal with “peak oil” and broader crises. It does seem improbable, not to mention insane, that Joe Sixpack can continue partying on cheap petroleum as if it were still 1962—shades of Carlyle’s formulation, “Soul extinct; stomach well alive”—but then the apocalypse does have a habit of not actually happening quite yet. Only a generation ago, the Club of Rome assured us that overpopulation would bring famine in its train from Scarsdale to Singapore. A decade previously, Americans took imminent nuclear annihilation so much for granted that Tom Lehrer wrote a bestselling song about it, one that present-day ethnic sensibilities would render unrecordable:

*We will all go together when we  
go,  
Every Hottentot and every  
Eskimo.  
When the air becomes uranious,  
We will all go simultaneous.  
Yes, we all will go together when  
we go.*

Meanwhile, Gray scornfully refers to the “cartoon science of creationism.” Why, when this science prevailed always and everywhere until the early 19th century and the likes of Charles Lyell? It could well be that disgust at theocons has led Gray to assume that anything they utter must be false. So coarse-minded a dismissal blunts the effectiveness of his whole conclusion. And it cheapens a tome which, despite its profuse typographical errors—Norman “Podoretz,” “Dostoyesky,” and “Rheinhold” Niebuhr—is worth anyone’s study. If only he had ended it with the noble words he uses on page 192: “Preserving the hard-won restraints of civilization is less exciting than throwing them away in order to achieve impossible ideals. Barbarism has a certain charm, particularly when it comes clothed in virtue.” ■

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[*Micronations: The Lonely Planet Guide to Home-Made Nations*, John Ryan, George Dunford, and Simon Sellars, Lonely Planet, 156 pages]

## Big Ideas Need Small Places

By Jesse Walker

*The patriot never under any circumstances boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of the smallness of it.*

—G.K. Chesterton

*You can't be a real country unless you have a beer and an airline—it helps if you have some kind of a football team, or some nuclear weapons, but at the very least you need a beer.*

—Frank Zappa

THE DESERT REPUBLIC of Molossia doesn't appear on many maps, and it doesn't have a seat in the United Nations. But if you drive about 18 miles northeast from Carson City, Nevada, you'll find it. It's not right there on the highway—you need to take a left at Lafond Avenue. Then there's another left at Wagon Wheel Way, and then you take a right on Mary Lane. “The Republic of Molossia is at number 226, just up on the right,” report the authors of *Micronations: The Lonely Planet Guide to Home-Made Nations*. “Make sure they're expecting you; don't just show up.”

Molossia has been independent since 1977, though it did not settle into its current location until the mid-'90s. It has a navy (an inflatable raft), a national observatory (a telescope), and a currency; the latter, called the Valora, is “pegged to the value of Pillsbury Cookie Dough.” With a total population of four, it's unable to field its own baseball team, so instead it focuses on broomball, a local sport that “can appear very similar to field hockey.” The republic also has its own time zone: according to the country's official website, Molossian Standard Time “is 39 minutes ahead of Pacific Standard Time, or if

you prefer, 21 minutes behind Mountain Standard Time.”

Molossia is a micronation: a home-brewed jurisdiction that doesn't qualify for statehood by most conventional measurements, but still proudly insists on its independence. To these small statelets, Vatican City is uncomfortably large and Liechtenstein is a leviathan. They're a familiar feature in fiction and film: the independent borough in G.K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*—the London district that stumbles into a temporary sovereignty in the comedy *Passport to Pimlico*—and the modern-medieval Duchy of Grand Fenwick in *The Mouse That Roared* and its sequels.

In real life—or, at least, that mode of life that isn't as fictional as a novel—micronations fall into three rough categories. There are the places that actually achieved a somewhat sovereign status, at least until a larger neighbor invaded or the head of state found another way to occupy his time. There are quiet backyard countries like Molossia, which may lay claim to territory but don't do anything that might aggravate the empires that surround them. And there are entirely virtual nations—a humorless grump might call them imaginary—that don't exist outside a pamphlet or a website.

The classic guide to such societies is Erwin Strauss's 1979 book, *How to Start Your Own Country: How You Can Profit from the Decline of the Nation State*. Since the '90s, several websites have built on Strauss's work; the best of them is James L. Erwin's *Footnotes to History* at [buckyogi.com/footnotes](http://buckyogi.com/footnotes). In 2005, the Scottish comedian Danny Wallace hosted a BBC miniseries about micronations, also called *How to Start Your Own Country*; it ended with the creation of the kingdom of Lovely, located in Wallace's apartment. (From his declaration of independence: “Please do get in touch if there are any legal ramifications to what I'm doing, or if you have any problems with it whatsoever. If you don't ring, I'll just assume everything's a-okay and proceed as planned.”) Now the Lonely Planet series has published a travel guide devoted entirely to these DIY polities.

The book, written primarily by the Australian journalist John Ryan, has a slightly different focus than its predecessors. Erwin is more interested in curious bits of history than in curious pieces of the present. Other websites tend to be focused on purely virtual nations, often because they're run by the webmaster-kings of such countries. Strauss's chief interest is those people making a genuine attempt to free themselves from the megastate by establishing a ministate—or, in some cases, a proprietary operation that does not pretend to be a state at all. (He devotes several pages to casino ships and offshore pirate radio stations.) Strauss also offers a surprisingly extensive discussion of micronational defense—or maybe it isn't so surprising since he also wrote a book called *Basement Nukes*.

Lonely Planet, by contrast, deals mainly with charming, tongue-in-cheek projects like Molossia. There are a few purely virtual countries here, but in general, it doesn't make sense to give space in a travel guide to places you can only visit with an Internet connection. There are a few "real" countries as well, but again, not too many. There is Sealand, a decommissioned sea fort in the North Sea that has been ruled and defended by Prince Paddy Roy Bates since 1967. There is Christiania, a hippie squatter district in Denmark—sorry, *adjacent* to Denmark—that has maintained its autonomy since 1971. (Officially, Christiania is anarchist, so it might be inaccurate to describe it as a state. But a friend who has visited the place tells me that in practice it's run by a benign oligarchy of drug dealers, so anarchist might not be the best label for it either.) And there are the Knights of Malta, who used to control a rather large swath of territory, but today hold just two buildings in Rome. They have diplomatic relations with 98 other countries, and Italy recognizes their sovereign status, so who am I to argue?

But most of the micronations here are less ambitious about asserting their autonomy. Instead, we have entities such as the mobile Copeman Empire (territory: a trailer), the tourist-friendly kingdom of Romkerhall (territory: a

hotel), and the libertarian principality of Freedonia (territory: none, but they're looking). "Many find it a rewarding hobby to run a model railroad, or operate model airplanes," Strauss wrote in his 1979 book. "These model enterprises have all the trappings of the real thing, in miniature. Similarly, it's possible to run a 'model country.' You need only declare your home to be an independent nation, and proceed from there."

The patron saint of such projects is Joshua Norton I, the San Francisco eccentric who in 1859 declared himself the emperor of the United States. He issued his own currency, which local businesses honored; he made royal proclamations, which the local newspapers printed; according to legend, he once managed to stop an anti-Chinese riot merely by standing in front of the mob and reciting the Lord's Prayer. I can't endorse all of his policies—the fines he levied on anyone he overheard calling the city "Frisco" were an unconscionable interference with freedom of speech—but his reign was altogether far less bloody than that of his two rival emperors in the east, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. When he died in 1880, tens of thousands of people attended his royal funeral.

Norton managed to live as an emperor through the exercise of sheer personality and is thus an inspiration to modern micronationalists. The Republic of Molossia includes a Norton Park, named for his imperial majesty, and a panel of microleaders recognizes their peers with the annual Norton Awards for Micronational Excellence and Achievement. Lonely Planet honors him appropriately with his own entry in the guide.

I did notice two factual errors in the book. A sidebar mentions a handful of western counties that voted in 1992 to secede from Kansas and start a state of their own; the authors misconstrued this as an attempt to leave the U.S. entirely, suggesting that the Australian authors might not grasp all the nuances of American politics. Similarly, the introduction includes a throwaway reference to the Branch Davidians of Waco as "a secessionist cult." Since when did the Davidi-

ans intend to secede from anything larger than the Davidian Seventh Day Adventists? I think the writer confused them with the Freemen of Justus Township, Montana, who really did declare themselves sovereign before the FBI arrived and arrested them in June 1996.

Still, the book is entertaining reading, and despite such minor errors, I assume it would be useful as an actual guide as well, if you ever decide to take a whirlwind tour of the world's micronations. Indeed, looking through it, I see I may have already been to as many as three of the countries listed. There is the State of NSK, an art project linked to the Slovenian band Laibach. It doesn't claim any actual territory, but I saw Laibach play a few years back, and it's possible I accidentally entered the state in the course of the concert. There is also the Maritime Republic of Eastport, located right over the bridge from Annapolis, Maryland. It apparently declared independence on Super Bowl Sunday, 1998, and marks its autonomy with an annual game of tug-of-war against the neighboring town. I've visited it at least once without ever noticing that I was touching the sweet soil of freedom.

And there are the Knights of Malta, with their two sovereign buildings in Rome. I stopped in a few years ago with my then-fiancée, now-wife, while we toured Italy—it wasn't far out of our way, and I'd always been curious about the place. The knights gamely opened their gates and allowed us to enter the parking area, where we spent a few minutes snapping pictures of each other.

I suppose it doesn't sound very exciting to hang around taking photos next to a bunch of cars. But I was living the dream. I was standing on a sovereign parking lot. If you've done that once, it's hard to restrain yourself from doing it again. Next time I'm in Nevada, I'll have to swing by the Republic of Molossia. Don't worry, I'll call ahead. ■

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# The Schwarzenegger Doctrine

News item, Oct. 27, 2007—Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger today spoke of the arsonists who set killer brushfire blazes in California: “We will hunt down the

people that are responsible for that.” In addition, Schwarzenegger expressed special thanks to President George W. Bush for “being such a tremendous partner.”

Future news item, c. 2008—In a major policy shift, Governor Schwarzenegger today announced that he was no longer actively pursuing the arsonists, believed hiding in Nevada, who had devastated California last year and caused billions of dollars in damage. “I know I pledged to ‘terminate’ those arsonists, but now we have new priorities. History summons us in a different direction. Our intelligence experts have identified even greater arson threats to California, as well as to our friends and neighbors. So now we must act immediately against grave and gathering threats, which could be launched at any time by remorseless pyromaniacs who hate us for no reason.”

Schwarzenegger, who early in his gubernatorial career seemed uncomfortable with soaring rhetoric, is now confidently using lofty language to describe the enemies of the Golden State. In particular, he has identified three states—Kansas, Nebraska, and Vermont—which form, he says, the “axis of ignition,” guilty of “state-sponsored pyromania.” Now, he continues, this axis poses an even greater danger than last year’s arsonists. And the danger could grow worse: “If these state-sponsors could gain access to WMC (“weapons of mass conflagration”), the fires of October 2007 would look, by comparison, like backyard barbeques.”

In the past, Schwarzenegger had warned, “Those who could become arsonists in the future are as bad as those who committed arson in the past.” More recently, the governor’s

Sacramento-based “brain trust” enunciated a new policy agenda, which some dub “The Schwarzenegger Doctrine,” calling for “pre-emption” of fire-starting state governments across the U.S.

But Schwarzenegger insists that low-level enforcement efforts will continue in Nevada, where Golden State police agents are working with local authorities to apprehend suspected arsonist cells within in the Silver State. However, most analysts believe that the leading arsonists have fled even further, into the badlands of Utah. But Schwarzenegger dismisses any continuing danger from the 2007 arsonists, wherever they might be: “We have those arsonists on the run; they are ineffective, hiding in canyons. The real danger, now, comes from the ‘axis of ignition.’”

In particular, Schwarzenegger has singled out Kansas, led by Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. Schwarzenegger, a Republican, told reporters, “The weapons of mass conflagration that we know she is hiding could cause enormous damage in California.” Reminded that Sebelius says she does not possess such weapons, Schwarzenegger shot back: “OK, let her *prove* that she is not hiding WMC in Kansas.”

Schwarzenegger refuses to negotiate directly with Sebelius, but he has been persuaded to work with the National Governors Association (NGA), issuing demands to the Sunflower State—demands that neutral analysts equate to full surrender. And yet as those NGA negotiations drag on, Schwarzenegger says, “Time is running out.”

The California governor is believed to be preparing a pre-emptive strike against WMC sites in Kansas, with or

without the NGA. Schwarzenegger is developing a “coalition of the willing”—including Indiana, Rhode Island, and Delaware—as allies in possible joint action against Kansas.

However, Schwarzenegger denies that any action is imminent. “Violence is our last resort.” But, he adds, “While I have no war plans on my desk, nothing is off the table.” He continues, “Kansans have just as much right to live their lives free from fire as Californians.”

Some have expressed concern about Schwarzenegger’s policy, fearing possible chaos in the Sunflower State. But Schwarzenegger dismisses those worries—“We are planning carefully for every possibility”—reminding Californians of the stakes as he sees them: “If you saw what I saw, the fires burning from Malibu to San Diego, you would understand the need to take this fight to the enemy. We will make Kansas the central front in our war against fire—not that I have made any final decision about Operation Kansas Freedom.”

In fact, some Schwarzenegger advisers speak grandly of a “Greater Midwest Initiative” to transform fire-usage across Middle America.

In other late-breaking developments, Schwarzenegger denied reports that he was building a secret prison site for suspected arsonists in Humboldt County. “That’s nonsense. We have all the prison space we need now that we have reopened Alcatraz and can give arson suspects the punishment—I mean, fair trials—that they deserve.”

Meanwhile, the Schwarzenegger administration brushes off reports of infiltration into California from Mexico. “There’s no danger to the south,” said a spokesman, “only folks coming across the border who need our help. Compassion does not stop at the Salton Sea.” The adviser added, “The governor is looking east, laser-like, to the real threat—Kansas.” ■